

PROCEEDINGS OF THE WESTMINSTER COMMISSIONERS OF SEWERS.

A SPECIAL court was held on Friday last, Capt. Hague in the chair.

Mr. Hertslet, the clerk, read a letter from the vestry clerk of St. Anne's, Paddington, complaining of nuisances from the want of drainage on the property of Sir John Eyre, and calling upon the court to put in force the powers of their new Act for the abatement of the same. Referred to the surveyor.—A memorial was read from a resident householder of Ladbroke-terrace, Notting-hill, which was signed by nine other persons, complaining of the pestiferous nature of a drain near their houses, which emitted effluvia of the most pernicious description, one life having already been sacrificed by it, while others were threatened, and calling upon the court to stop and entirely remove the same. The surveyor was ordered to take immediate steps in the matter.—A most voluminous document was next handed in from Mr. Edmund Warne, the vestry clerk of the parish of St. Anne, Soho, drawing the attention of the court to the very deficient state of the drainage of that locality, and enumerating upwards of fifty streets that were entirely without, or only partially provided with sewerage. That the health of the inhabitants was most seriously affected thereby, and praying relief under the powers of this court. This document led to a long conversation, and it was finally ordered that Mr. Warne be informed that the subject should be taken into immediate consideration.

The Drainage of Long Acre.—It will be remembered that a short time since M. Le Breton brought before the court the subject of the loss of life of George Grosse, of Langley-court, Long Acre, from the want of proper drainage, and the surveyor of this court was ordered to report on the best means of remedying the evil and preventing similar fatal results. In accordance with this resolution, Mr. Phillips presented the following report:—

"Long Acre is situated on a summit level, being the ridge of a hill. From Drury-lane to St. Martin's-lane the ground falls to the westward, and it subsides to the northward and southward. As the keeping of all sewers properly washed out and cleansed must necessarily depend on a good supply of water, the principle which I have thought it best to follow for the proposed drainage of Long Acre, is to obtain this by carrying a sewer from the lower end of Long Acre and St. Martin's lane to the upper end at Drury-lane, forming junctions with the main sewers at the two last-mentioned places. It is not intended by this means to divert the sewerage from Drury-lane, and so to surcharge the sewer in St. Martin's-lane, but an ample supply of water can thus, when required, be obtained from the sewer in Drury-lane, situated on a high level, for washing out not only the proposed sewer in Long Acre, but also the sewers proposed to be built in the various streets, alleys, and courts in the immediate vicinity on a low level.

The position and level of the sewer proposed will have reference to carrying out this principle to the improvement and drainage of the neighbourhood generally.

Having a due regard to their strength and durability, economy in the construction of sewers is as essentially a feature to be considered and acted upon as the arrangement for keeping them cleansed. After mature consideration, therefore, I am decidedly of opinion, that for all practical purposes a sewer of the accompanying shape, size, and thickness (4½ inches) will be found sufficient and ample for the drainage of Long Acre. The greater part of it may be executed by tunnelling, for as the earth through which it will pass is of a gravelly nature, not liable to expand and slip, it is so far favourable for its construction.

The total length of sewer required, including the necessary junctions for the side streets, courts, &c., will be about 1,825 feet, and I estimate the expense at 750l. The same length of the present No. 2 sewer (9-inch brickwork) will cost 1,500l., or double the former sum. Should the court determine to build the half-brick sewer as proposed by me, I think the court should execute the work."

Mr. T. L. Donaldson wished, in the first instance, to know who was to pay for the proposed work, and whether it would be fair to tax the present generation for carrying out an enormous system which must tend to the benefit of their successors. He thought, therefore, that it was highly necessary that they should proceed with caution, and not ruin by expenses those whose health they were about to preserve, and that all their works should be done with extreme caution. He was of opinion, that as the Mercers' Company had profited by the property, that they ought to build the sewer, and this court might also compel them to pay for it.

Mr. Le Breton said the state of Long Acre required their immediate attention, for by the want of drainage people had lost their lives, while they had for years and years been endeavouring to com-

pel the owners of the property,—not only the Mercers' Company, but other proprietors,—to do what was required, but without success. By the provisions of the new Act they had the power to execute the works, and to compel the proprietors to pay for their construction. As to any difficulty about raising the money, he thought a few hundred pounds would be lent with readiness by the Messrs. Drammond at 5 per cent., for he had himself that day effected a loan for the baths and washhouses of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, with the Economic Assurance Company, of 10,000l., at 5 per cent. Under ordinary circumstances it was necessary that they should proceed with caution; but in this case it was their bounden duty to proceed with the required work before the winter overtook them, and not to allow another year to go on without some improvement, particularly as a petition had been presented, signed by nearly every inhabitant, requiring immediately that something should be done. The surveyor held his power under the court, and was an officer of great value, with great experience in these matters, and his calculations in the case of Kensington had been verified to the letter. In fact, contractors had been found to do the work even below the estimate. In Southampton very extensive works had been done in 4½ inch work, and found to be very successful; and he thought reducing their plan to 4½ inches would give them the means of making sewers where they were never before thought of, but where they were most required; for it appeared that it was in the suburban districts where the greater portion of their sewers were constructed, while very little money was laid out in making new sewers in the very centre of London. Few persons were aware that in a street like Long Acre, within half a mile of Trafalgar-square, there was no sewer, but that the accumulation of the filth of cesspools was necessary at intervals to be pumped into the public streets. He hoped, therefore, that this court would immediately carry out the measure proposed, and concluded by moving,—“That the report of the surveyor on the sewerage of Long Acre be adopted, and in 4½ inches work.”

Mr. L. Wood seconded the motion.

Mr. W. Donaldson was happy they were at last in the position to carry out the plan of forming a sewer in Long Acre, and he thought it would be a good occasion for forcing contributions from the owners of the property there, and trusted it would not be done altogether at the expense of the court or the district, but that such portion as could should be claimed from individuals. The public, too, ought to know that it was not the fault of this court that the work had not been done before, but that their power was unequal to enable them to do so. With respect to the plan, he thought it was a desirable one; but as to the 4½-inch work, he felt alarm when it was proposed for Kensington, being in a district which might at a future time be used for the drainage of the entire locality; and he was not at all satisfied with the proposition of 4½-inch work for such a district as Long Acre. They ought not to be called upon to build sewers every twenty or thirty years, but they should be of that substantial nature as would last for ages. Expense ought not to be taken into account, but durability should be their first consideration, and, therefore, he was not prepared to vote for the plan proposed.

The surveyor had made a calculation, and the difference between 4½-inch work and 9-inch work was as between 7s. 6d. and 12s. 3d.

Mr. Gunter, not being a practical man, should vote for the plan of the surveyor; for if even the sewer should fall in, he should not consider any blame due to himself. They had placed their surveyor in authority, and he thought they should act upon his suggestions, and not upon those of other persons.

Mr. Hawkes said every commissioner ought to use his own discretion. He did not think that the plan proposed for such a thoroughfare as Long Acre was what the public had a right to expect, and he could not support the proposition for doing the work on the 4½-inch principle.

Mr. Halswell supported the original motion.

Mr. T. L. Donaldson was of opinion that the whole plan should be referred back to the surveyor, as he objected to the court doing the work. They had the power at any time to compel the Mercers' Company to execute the works in Long Acre, but the collateral streets and alleys were totally unprovided for. The people in Long Acre had the power to remedy themselves, but in the back streets, where pestilence was raging, the evil was left untouched. Let them spend the money in forming sewers there, and afterwards bring that powerful body, the Mercers' Company, before the public, and compel them to do what was required. He moved, as an amendment, “That the plan be referred back to the surveyor, to report as well upon the several courts and alleys collateral with Long Acre, as Long Acre itself, and to submit estimates for the same.”

Mr. Gutch seconded the amendment. Mr.

Cantwell, as a practical man, dissented from an opinion given by the surveyor, that he would sooner have the arch turned in mortar than cement, and gave it as his opinion, that 4½ inch brickwork if done in cement was equal to 9 inch work in mortar. Mr. Kendall objected to 4½ inch work.

Mr. Le Breton replied, and asserted that both Mr. Barry and Mr. Hardwick were favourable to 4½ inch work.

The Chairman then put the amendment, which was negatived by a majority of 8 to 3; and a subsequent amendment, adopting the plan of the surveyor, excepting that the work should be 9 inches, instead of 4½, was rejected by 6 to 2. The original resolution was then carried, as was also the following:—“That the solicitors be required to prepare and give all necessary notices for the works in Long Acre, under the provisions of the Act 10 & 11 Vict., cap. 70.”

The Sanatory Commission at Gwyder House.—Mr. T. L. Donaldson drew the attention of the court to a notice in one of the morning journals as to the proceedings of the sanatory commission, stating that their surveyor had given evidence before it, and wished to know whether he had any communication to make to the court on the evidence he had given.

The Chairman said, that in reference to this subject, the surveyor had placed himself entirely in his hands, and such being the case, he now told him that he thought the most prudent course for him to pursue was not to disclose the nature of the evidence given by him to the sanatory commission at Gwyder House. Mr. T. L. Donaldson was surprised at the decision of the chairman, although he must of course bow to it. The surveyor said, his examination was a very lengthened one, and embraced a variety of questions, but he could not tax his memory with the facts.

Mr. Le Breton said, in the course of his examination he might have been asked whether their court was an efficient one, but they could not expect him to answer such a question there. Mr. Phillips: If I am to give an honest opinion, I should say this court is not an efficient one. Mr. Hawkes: I should say so too, by the appointment of such inefficient officers.

WANT OF HOUSES IN EDINBURGH.—A singular and yet a very natural reaction is at length about to take the place of that stagnation in the building trades, which, in its turn, inevitably followed on the mad speculations, which, nearly a quarter of a century since, reared up an entire new city, as if by magic, in the midst of corn-fields and farm-houses. Such a lesson had been then learned as has scarcely yet been forgotten; so that the necessary demands of a growing population have been hitherto unheeded, and the consequence now is, an exorbitant rise of rents, the emigration of the new town ancient immigrants back again to the old town whence they came, and the ousting of the poorer classes, on whose sturdy shoulders all heavy loads of grievance ever ultimately fall, even out of the old town, which had been so long since, as it were, handed down to them. More room is now the outcry, and the only fear may shortly be, that a new generation of builders, who have neither reaped nor partaken of the experience of their now wiser fathers, may not deign to benefit by that experience, but once embarked, may rather vie with them in a new race of floating building speculations to supply the now very urgent demand. While not a seventh part of the former amount of building is as yet in progress, there has been an immense increase of alteration and improvement, all, however, tending rather to diminish the amount of accommodation than to increase it. What are now required, are the rapid erection of cheap and plain, but substantial erections in or near the outskirts of the city, old or new, for the middle classes, and square or other blocks of cottages, in like localities, with open airy sites, for the lower. “And there is little doubt,” observes the *Mail*, “that there will ways and means be found of producing the requisite house accommodation in and around the city, so soon as it becomes obvious to builders or speculators that it is urgently wanted and sure to pay,” as it now appears to be.

SCHOOL OF DESIGN, SOMERSET HOUSE.—Nothing has yet been done by the Board of Trade to alter the system at the school. It is to open on Monday next, and efforts are being made to ensure a council meeting on Tuesday, which, owing to the retirements, is a difficult matter.